

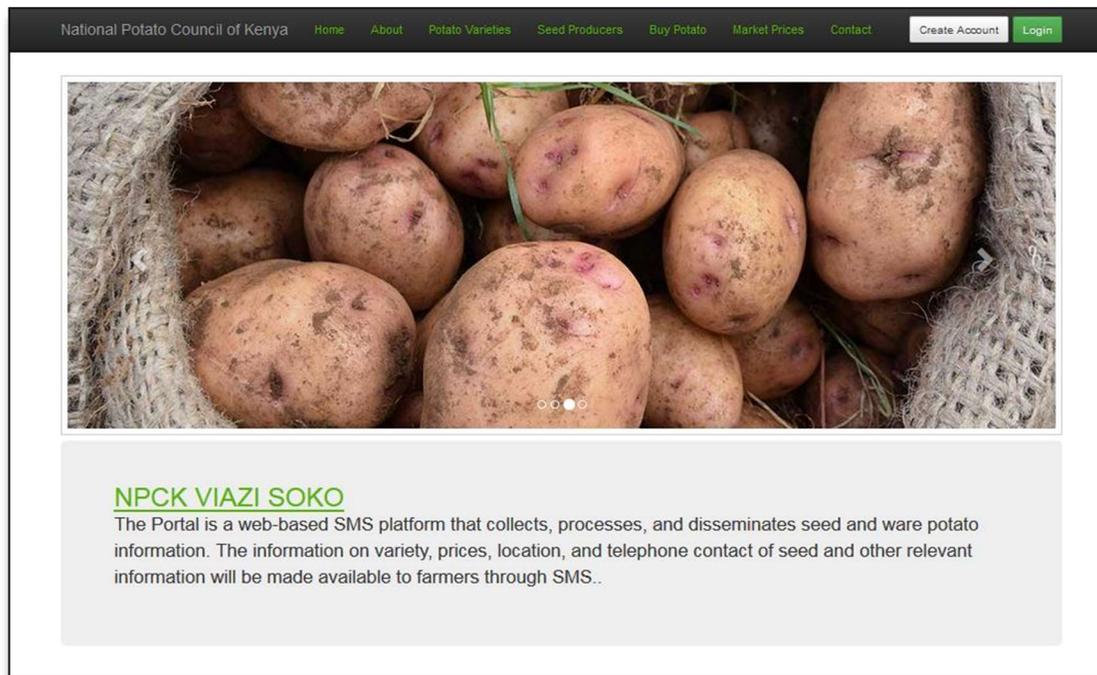
Preparing for work in the potato sector: TAGDev students participate in field attachment at National Potato Council of Kenya

For two months, at the end of 2018, three students supported by the [TAGDev Potato Community Action Research Project \(CARP+\)](#) were attached for internship at the National Potato Council of Kenya (NPCK) based in Nairobi. They were among the five students of the first cohort of Master of Science in Community Studies and Extension at Egerton University sponsored by the TAGDev Programme coordinated by RUFORUM and funded by the MasterCard Foundation. Internships are part of the requirements for the Master's in Community Studies and they aim to provide students with opportunities for experiential learning, application of knowledge and skills acquired in class and co-generation of knowledge which organizations and communities can utilize for socioeconomic development.

Activities at the National Potato Council of Kenya

The National Potato Council of Kenya (NPCK) is a public-private-partnership and multi-stakeholder organization whose role is to promote, protect and coordinate the potato subsector in the country. To kick off the internship, the three students were introduced to all departments of the Council and held briefing meetings with each department to familiarize themselves with the organisation and its work. Together with the management team, they then developed a work plan for the period. For an enriching experience, planned activities included a mix of field work, routine operations and special assignments. Highlights of activities implemented were:

- **Training farmers on the [Viazi Soko platform](#)**, a web-based SMS platform of the NCPK that collects, processes, and disseminates potato information. The training took place during a Farmer Field Day held in Nyandarua. After the training, farmers were assisted to register with the platform so they could access information on potatoes as well as connect with certified seed potato producers, input suppliers and potato buyers
- **Establishing and supervising demonstration plots on Zeba**, a starch-based water absorbent which promotes water retention in potatoes. Zeba is planted together with potatoes for strong and profuse root growth, quick and healthy crop establishment and water stress tolerance. The students worked with farmers to set up and monitor these plots



The Viazi Soko SMS platform (<https://www.npckviazisoko.com>)

- **Sorting, grading weighing and packaging potatoes** at NPCK stores. The process mainly involved removing diseased, cut and deformed tubers then aggregating the healthy ones according to variety before packing in 50kg bags ready for sale
- **Policy and lobbying:** The students participated in a public forum on draft potato regulations held at the Kenya Agricultural Research and Livestock Organisation (KARLRO) headquarters
- **Participation in partnership meetings** with a wide range of stakeholders and actors in the potato industry. The students were involved in meetings between the Council and partners such as YARA, Muchiri FM, Fresh Care Africa and GIZ to discuss how best they could work together and avoid duplication of efforts
- **Development of the annual potato magazine** used for creating awareness and reporting about the activities of the sub-sector. The students edited and reviewed articles submitted

In addition, the students also engaged in activities like organizing the NPCK Annual General Meeting, updating the Council's database of partners, and familiarization with operations of other departments in the Council like human resources, administration and finance.

Student Testimonies

The internship seems to have been well appreciated by the students who shared reflections from their experiences as below:

Lucky Nyasulu

The attachment experience was good as I was engaged in many activities and gained hands-on experience in areas such as post-harvest handling of potatoes and training farmers in implementing new technologies. With the knowledge I gained on the Viazi Soko platform, I look forward to sharing it with the potato farmers under the CARP+ Project and helping them register on the platform so that they can benefit from the information therein. The orientation in organisation structure and day-to-day operation activities of NPCK helped me to understand how organization systems operate. Through attending the partnership meetings, i gained negotiation skills and my experience with helping to organize the Annual General Meeting has made me a better event planner. I also gained skills in organisational communication, employee management, team building and employee code of conduct which I believe will help me in my future career.



Lucky explaining the Viazi Soko Platform to a farmer during the Farmers Field Day in Nyandarua County

Judith Cheruiyot



The attachment provided an opportunity for me to gain hands-on experience and apply theoretical knowledge to real life situations. From it, I gained lifelong skills and knowledge which will be important for my studies, career development and community engagement. These included experience in potato demonstration plot management, organizational and operational skills, event planning and management, post-harvest handling of potatoes and stakeholder engagement. This was in addition to other skills gained in data management, community training and understanding of policy making processes.

Amwine Lamech

The internship experience taught me a lot which will benefit me and the community work i am engaged in. For example, with what I learned about the policy development process right from issue identification, lobbying, development and implementation, I have written a policy belief on legalization of clean seed potato in Kenya, which is now being used for lobbying. If passed, this policy will contribute to the objectives of the CARP+ project by helping farmers to access high quality seed for increased potato productivity. I also learnt and appreciated the process of potato strategy formulation, development and implementation, the process of potato production, both seed and ware, and marketing of potatoes. The art of sorting, grading, and separation of potato varieties for trade is important as different grades (sizes) and varieties have different purposes and fetch different prices from different markets. I will share this knowledge with the farmers I work with in order for them to increase their earnings.



Amwine (right) and Nyasulu (left) and interacting with the farmer during field supervision in Nyahururu

While working with different stakeholders -farmers, partners, NPCK staff and even fellow interns I gained valuable skills in mobilization, negotiation and communication. I am also proud to have participated in the 2018 Nairobi Standard Chartered Marathon as part of the Council's corporate social responsibility. I successfully completed the 10km race and was awarded a medal. Overall, the attachment programme gave me memorable experiences and lessons which place me in a better position than if I had not undertaken it. I highly recommended it for all students.



Amwine (left) and some of potato team members pause for a photo after the 2018 Standard Chartered Marathon

The students express their gratitude to the MasterCard Foundation and TAGDev programme at Egerton for the financial support during the attachment period; the host organization, National Potato Council of Kenya, for allowing them to gain invaluable hands on experience; and the Department for Applied Community and Development Studies together with the CARP+ Potato Project at Egerton University for facilitating the attachment programme.